Confidential Tips

From One Kinesthetic (Active) Learner to Another:
This Means We’ve Got the Motors, Man, Like ALL of the Time!

As kinesthetic learners, we have a need to keep our bodies in motion in order to learn. This is sometimes annoying and distracting to others around us. This can be an advantage or a disadvantage, depending upon how we handle our need to move around. Our task is to learn socially acceptable (non-annoying) ways of making use of what is a fun way to learn. Through 50 odd years of learning (and believe me, many of them were indeed quite odd!), I have developed a few techniques that keep me at least marginally socially acceptable. They are as follows:

1. Use a rocking chair (if you have one) when you are reading. You can move around as much as you like by rocking the chair.

2. Walk around when you read, if you have to. Find or make an obstacle-free path so you don’t trip over things, and start walking around. When you get tired, sit down.

3. If you have to sit in a chair or a desk, wiggle your foot. This is not the best solution, but it works for limited periods of time. I find that it works best during tests.

4. Doodle; but keep it clean in case someone else sees it.

5. Take lots of notes. Kinesthetic learners actually learn when they write stuff down because they are physically doing something. Spelling and grammar do not matter when it comes to taking notes, so don’t worry about it, just do it. The bonus is that you generate something to study from. After being in and out of school for millions of years now, I have rafts of notes, some elaborately illustrated with doodles. These are fun to look at later on, and quite useful at test time.

6. When you take classes that have labs with them, really prepare for the labs. You have the potential to learn much more from the lab experience than non-kinesthetic learners. Organize yourself beforehand. I had several lab partners who were just as kinesthetic as I was, and we had everyone fooled because we were so organized ahead of time. We even made labels for beakers in chemistry prior to class.

7. Actually physically go through the steps of something as much as you can (and still be socially acceptable). This physical rehearsal may look silly to others, but it will really help you learn, understand, and remember.

8. When you have to write something for a class, do not think that you have to know what you are going to write before you write it. Having a single idea is the only real starting point that you need. Write down your idea as soon as it hits you—even if it’s on a napkin or something of that nature. Some of the best writers begin their thoughts on napkins in restaurants. The lady who wrote the Harry Potter books (J. K Rowling), for one, did this. And then, at the earliest opportunity, sit down at the computer and start freewriting. When

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you feel you are going somewhere, stop, re-read, and start to organize it. Did you know that the famous writer Ernest Hemingway always stopped writing when he knew what the next thing he was going to write was? That way he knew that he always had a starting point. Many famous writers have writing blocks, and experience a great deal of difficulty in getting started. I suspect that many of these writers are kinesthetic learners. Kinesthetic learners, if I am much of a guide, have a hard time doing anything that does not involve some physical activity. Sitting in a chair and typing isn’t very physical. One prominent former member of Congress used to work at a desk where he could stand up and type. This way, he could move around and still get the job done. (He also had a rocking chair in his office!)

9. When faced with a really big project, e.g., a paper—and we know all projects have deadlines—a different strategy is required for kinesthetic learners. Douglas Adams, a notorious procrastinator, (the guy who wrote the *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*) once said something to the effect of “I love deadlines. I especially love the whooshing sound they make when they go by.” Those of us who are overwhelmed by big projects have had plenty of experience with this “whooshing” and it is not pleasant. The problem with projects is that they are time-lined, which means that one cannot do stuff lower on the list until the stuff on the beginning part is done. Some things can be done all the time, and guess what, those are the things that kinesthetic learners do, at the expense of everything else.

A great strategy to get big projects done on time is to break the project up into little tiny doable parts and begin each part with a physical activity. All you have to have is a physical ritual that you can do to get started each time, and then, you can roll along. Things that I do that get me rolling are sharpening a bunch of pencils, decluttering my desk or work area—you get the picture. Kinesthetic learners need work rituals and habits that begin with or incorporate physical elements. Find good ones that work for you, and whammo, you will find yourself getting your work done. Just make sure that you stick to your ritual and not expand it. Too much dinking around with stuff on your desk is stalling and procrastinating. Setting specific tasks that usually take the same amount of time to do each time are the kinds of things you need on your getting-started strategy list.

10. Take a walk! This is a great way to get ideas. Bring an index card and a pencil with you so you can jot down ideas as you generate them. Get regular physical exercise, period. You need it as a kinesthetic learner more than non-kinesthetic learners do because you just like to move around!

Have fun and enjoy your preferred way of learning!

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